

Educator top tips

5 ways educators are using LifeSkills resources to create a culture of skills development in their schools

During the week of LifeSkills Unpacked a diverse range of voices from across society have made the case for why it is so important to invest in skills development for young people.

It's not just the right thing to do to set them up for successful futures, to thrive in their careers and find meaningful work; it also gives them the tools to build the better world they want to see.

If we can empower this passionate generation to do just that, then we all benefit.

Throughout the week we have also heard from a range of educators about how they are creating a culture of skills development in their classrooms, schools and colleges. Below are some of their key tips and ideas for what you can do in your own settings.

1. Teachers don't have to do it all.

In our [opening webinar \(watch here\)](#), experts including Neil Carberry made the case that government often expects schools to do it all.

He was clear that we shouldn't expect schools to solve all of society's challenges – and what they are good at is providing a quality education for young people.

Instead, he argued that more of society needs to step up, including more investment from businesses in education and training for new and experienced employees.

As part of a more collaborative approach to supporting young people, educators should make more of resources like LifeSkills that are developed by experts with capacity and knowledge to focus on areas beyond schools' core business.

Top tip 1

Stacey, a Careers Leader who hosted our [sustainable skills podcast](#), told us that although her school has a curriculum with skills development at their heart, she still looks to use off the shelf resources where she can. She said teachers don't need to reinvent the wheel every time, and using trusted resources can help save time and manage workload.

In her [skills spotlight film](#), Jyoti Pettit shared how she has used resources from LifeSkills to develop students' leadership. By drawing on the resources, which she knows are high quality and designed by real teachers she has built numerous additional skills development touchpoint into her school's curriculum – including 20 minute 'skills breaks' within longer careers sessions.

2. Skills development should not stand alone – it is most effective when educators take a consistent, cross-curricular approach.

You don't need to overhaul your whole curriculum to put skills front and centre – this is a lot of work and schools have many competing pressures.

Instead, you can do it in a manageable way – look for opportunities to weave core transferable skills and careers links into the 'background' of other subjects and lessons.

On our [sustainable skills podcast \(here\)](#), Helen Janota recommended using careers and labour market information as the 'background context' for subject lessons to build student knowledge. For example, in a Maths lesson when students are working on graphs, could they use ones showing trends in the local jobs market and employment?

Similarly, she highlighted that subjects like PE are often particularly effective at developing core transferable skills like leadership and communication – but teachers don't always feel confident to explicitly highlight the skills development taking place.

Recognising the practice that's already building core transferable skills in different lessons can help students see how they are developing the same skills across the whole curriculum. LifeSkills resources can give a common language for these conversations, and help students feel more confident communicating their own skills

Top tip 2

A secondary school achievement and standards leader says that the importance of having a common language for skills cannot be understated: *"in our trust, we have really spent time making sure we're focused on developing the same core skills across the curriculum. That work is all for nothing if students don't realise or recognise the skills they're building – so we've worked just as hard at having a common language. Tools like LifeSkills are a great place for schools to start on this journey"*.

A KS2 teacher and primary leader told us they use LifeSkills resources regularly as part of a themed week in school, which *"gave us a much more focused plan to the week rather than what we've had previously of just go away and do it for yourself, which is brilliant."*



3. Pick a few core transferable skills that sit across multiple curriculum priorities – investing a few of the most important skills underpinning priorities in your curriculum can avoid ‘initiativitis’.

A number of educators who shared their tips across the Unpacked week spoke about the dangers of ‘initiative-itis’ – overloading the curriculum with too many worthy or well-meaning ‘things’.

A LifeSkills educator explained that “we’re constantly trying to improve the aspirations of our young people, and to break the cycle of possibly third-generation worklessness within families and to encourage the parents of the children as well to support their children in education and wanting to do better.”

In our [financial capability Q&A document](#), Lisa Worgan said that as educators there are often lots of things that you want to help address for your intake of students – from improving financial habits and behaviours to helping them manage their wellbeing.

She warned that if you try to tackle each of these things ‘downstream’ it crowds out the curriculum and gives confusing mixed messages to students – even when many of the topics you’re talking about are based on similar core transferable skills.

For example, resilience and adaptability underpin all of the challenges she described above. Explicitly investing in these underpinning skills will help students tackle all these challenges and more – and is more sustainable than adding lots of new topics to the curriculum.

Top tip 3

A Careers Leader told us that “early on, I look at the data locally for the surrounding area, including destination data. I invite guest speakers in for the gaps identified. For example, if no one historically has been to uni in their family, arrange a uni visit to school... or a Q&A with a student who had low aspirations but is now aiming high”.

A secondary school achievement and standards leader said “it would be overwhelming to try and tackle each of those issues we care about for our cohort – improving their social mobility, financial capability, mental health or work readiness – on their own. Identifying and strengthening the common skills that lie behind them is more sustainable – and means making a difference without dramatically increasing teacher workload.”



4. Help students to see their own strengths – it helps them to see their own areas for development and to talk about those skills confidently to employers and on CVs.

A common theme was around helping students to understand and strengthen their aspirations – that though many students did not lack aspiration, they had fewer ideas about how to realise them or had aspirations that were not grounded in a proper understanding of careers, or their own skills and passions.

Using LifeSkills resources to develop core transferable skills like communication and adaptability gives students the ability to recognise where their strengths and passions lie – and see the practical difference they could make to growing them.

Educators talked about the benefits of a strengths based approach to CV and interviews preparation – and as much as anything this was helpful because it gave them a common language for skills, across the school.

Top tip 4

One educator said “I think although we do have a duty to make children aware of what jobs are available, and raise their aspirations, I think that we also can’t belittle or think poorly of the children that don’t have what we would consider high aspirations. I think it’s almost taking away what they want to be.... and making sure that wherever they go in the future that they feel comfortable when they get there.”

An FE educator had found success using “a range of LifeSkills resources, along with our own and linking them to vocational areas. I’d start with something like recognising skills for success in the workplace, do a skills audit to see where we are, before we look at setting goals. Then use lessons such listening and speaking, leadership, staying positive to build these areas. Then I would start introducing community projects, to apply these skills. We would have a client, a brief, submit plans...”

This had a positive impact helping their students “identify their skills and qualities, when they felt that they had none before”, for example by helping them to create positive CVs focusing on what they were working towards now, rather than the little achievement they had previously. This has helped them to identify positive experiences to discuss at interview.”



5. Shout about your successes and celebrate the little wins along the way – it helps staff and students to see the impact that investing in skills development is having across the school.

In our [opening webinar](#) Saeed highlighted the difference empowering young people in Greater Manchester through the charity he founded has made. Youth Leads gives young people the tools to make a difference to issues they care about – and they have had huge impact. Examples include campaigns to encourage young people to be responsible and reduce social contact during the pandemic, and a 'Be Period Proud' campaign to increase uptake of the government's free sanitary products programme.

He argued that highlighting the difference young people are making is a great way to show the importance of developing core transferable skills – and schools need to keep giving young people the outlets to influence change.

This applies just as much in schools – educators are taking the time to invest in great teaching and learning, so we need to make sure we're including time and space to celebrate our great practice and the difference it's having. This can help build a sense of collective achievement.

Top tip 5

A secondary achievement and standards leader told us that *"sharing the success we have had in our schools building students' skills has transformed our relationship with parents. This was sometimes challenging before – now the schools feels like it's at the heart of the community, and it's a collective source of pride. They have seen what we're trying to do and the journey we are on"*.

In our [panellists Q&A document](#), Jyoti shared the impact it had for their students *"it really is making a difference. I have had students in the past with the skills and confidence to organise and carry out a gap year/year abroad because of the skills they have been taught and acquired. I have even had students contact me after leaving school thanking for the financial education they received because they feel better prepared than their peers at uni"*.

Another educator said, in our research ["Developing Young People's Aspirations"](#) that they are *"proud of the fact that the work we have done with Barclays LifeSkills has got us to the point where we can have Mock Interviews for our Year 11 students"* and highlighted the impact it had for one Y11 student in particular.

